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Next 11 Page(s) In Document Exempt

Approved For Release 2004/12/02 : CIA-RDP80T00634A000500010026-3

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

8 December 1978

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The South Korean National Assembly Elections:  
President Pak Takes a Calculated Risk

Summary

President Pak and his ruling Democratic Republican Party (DRP) are attempting to strike a fine balance in the National Assembly elections scheduled for 12 December. The Pak government clearly hopes to obtain a favorable electoral result that will reinforce its claim that the present "Yushin" constitutional system is widely accepted, and provide an auspicious start for Pak's new six-year term that begins late this month. At the same time, Pak wants the election carried out in a manner that appears reasonably fair and free of irregularities to domestic and foreign observers, including those in the US. Pak appears likely to achieve a qualified success, both in terms of the election outcome and how it is carried out.

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The ruling party almost certainly will win more of the contested assembly seats than the major opposition party, maintaining firm government control in that body.

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The DRP also is expected to win a greater proportion of the psychologically meaningful popular vote than its main rival, but--in part because the election may be freer of manipulation than most in the past--there is a good deal of uncertainty over just how impressive that score will be. [REDACTED]

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On the "fairness" question, the government will probably also receive relatively high marks, although some irregularities are inevitable, and Pak and his party will not escape criticism for their large-scale campaign spending and for the strict limitations on representative government that are built into the present political system in Korea. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Most important, real control of the national government itself is by no means at stake. Pak already has been elected to another term as president by the hand-picked National Conference for Unification in an uncontested ballot, conducted quickly and with little fanfare last July. Pak will be inaugurated into that powerful office on 27 December regardless of the outcome of next week's assembly vote. [REDACTED]

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Control of the National Assembly itself is not really up for grabs either. The present constitution allows Pak to appoint one-third of the members outright. Moreover, South Korea's current electoral law stipulates that the two highest vote getters in each district win seats, encouraging a kind of "buddy system" arrangement in which the runner-up is also elected and the government and opposition parties roughly split the contested seats. [REDACTED]

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Even so, if Pak maintains his "hands off" policy throughout the election, as seems likely now, he risks an electoral result in terms of the popular vote that could fall short of the convincing voter endorsement he seeks. [REDACTED]

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25X1 In the last National Assembly election in 1973 the DRP won only 38.8 percent of the popular vote, and 68 of the contested seats, compared to 32.8 percent for the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP), which gave it 55 seats. (The opposition splinter group called the Democratic Unification Party (DUP) won 10.2 percent of the vote and three seats; and 18.1 percent of the vote and 15 seats went to Independents.) Both the DRP and the NDP have stated that their goals this time are 40 percent of the popular vote. The government seems likely to come close to that target, but there are a number of factors that could make the task difficult: [REDACTED]

25X1 --Urbanization: the opposition candidates have traditionally fared better than their pro-government counterparts in urban areas; between 1973 and 1978 nearly a million additional voters--close to 5 percent of the electorate--are estimated to have moved to the cities. [REDACTED]

25X1 --More young voters: the opposition parties also have often done better than the government party with younger voters; between 1973 and 1978 another million voters in the age group 21 through 28 have been added to the voter rolls. [REDACTED]

25X1 --More independent candidates: there are twice as many independent candidates--250--running in next week's election than there were in 1973 and many appear well financed. The independents are expected to make greater inroads into the opposition vote, but they may well reduce the government's tally as well. [REDACTED]

#### The Government's Record of Accomplishment

25X1 On the other side of the coin, there are important factors that favor Pak's party, the most important of which is the impressive record of accomplishment of his administration in the areas of economic development, national security, and the general prestige of South Korea in the international community: [REDACTED]

--South Korea has had the fastest growing economy among the developing countries in recent years; Seoul's GNP has increased more than 10 percent each year since 1963; last year the increase in real wages after inflation was 20 percent; moreover, Korea's new wealth is being broadly and equitably distributed throughout the urban and rural populations, according to authoritative independent studies. [REDACTED]

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--In the area of national security, the South still has some military shortcomings, but Seoul has recovered its composure following the shocks of Vietnam's fall and the announcement of US troop withdrawals; impressive defense industries are being built up steadily in the South, and most South Koreans appear to have confidence in President Pak's leadership in this area. [REDACTED]

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--President Pak can credibly claim to have managed Seoul's diplomacy fairly well; he has weathered a crisis in relations with the US, and elsewhere around the world the South has earned a considerable degree of prestige, largely as a result of its economic competence, which is a source of pride to many ordinary Koreans. [REDACTED]

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Another key advantage for Pak is the extensive, country-wide organization of the DRP, which has ample finances which it reportedly is spending freely in the current campaign. [REDACTED]

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#### The Opposition Remains Divided

Pak's political opponents by all accounts remain in a weakened condition due to chronic factionalism and a lack of leadership, organization, and funding. In the curtailed electoral campaigning that is at present allowed in Korea, opposition candidates have been assailing the government on a variety of issues: the Tongsun Park affair, the so-called Apartment Scandal, inflation, high taxes, the alleged corrupt relationship between big business and

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25X1 government, and the restricted character of "Korean Democracy" today, including Pak's Emergency Measure 9, which prohibits most criticism of the government. None of these problems, however, appears to have really galvanized popular opinion against the government. [REDACTED]

25X1 Despite such attacks, the more militant dissident groups--students, intellectuals, Christian activists--scorn the NDP, charging that it is too moderate and has "sold out" to the government. The militants have called for demonstrations against the government and a boycott of the assembly election. The government has closed down the universities early for the winter vacation in order to head off the demonstrations. The dissidents' call for a boycott could reduce voter turnout a bit, but a more significant impact actually may be to erode the vote for opposition party candidates. [REDACTED]

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